

University of Birmingham

Code of Practice for Leave of Absence Procedures

Purpose of Paper

1. APRC is asked to **consider** and, if thought appropriate, **approve** a Code of Practice for Leave of Absence Procedures for all Registered Students at the University of Birmingham, for implementation as of the 2011/12 academic session. The proposed Code of Practice is attached at Appendix 1.

Background and Consultation

2. Historically there has been no universally agreed policy and little formalised guidance regarding Leave of Absence. The challenges that this has presented, for both staff and students, has become increasingly more evident as a result of the demands of statutory compliance.
3. In response to this lack of an approved procedure, a small working group (comprising representatives from all five Colleges and from Academic Services) was set up to review the current situation and make proposals for a Code of Practice for Leave of Absence Procedures.

Definition of a Leave of Absence

4. A Leave of Absence is a recognised and authorised break from studies – it should not be sought as a means to extend study periods and the decision should not be taken lightly because of the wider implications of a Leave of Absence.
5. A Leave of Absence is not a right as such, (although it may be a requirement), and therefore it may be refused based in some circumstances.

Implications of a Leave of Absence

6. There are a number of implications associated with a Leave of Absence, and these include, impact upon student funding provision (such as student loans, scholarships and research grants) and tuition fees.
7. Students who are in the UK on a student visa are required by law to leave the country for their period of absence from studies, and hence all visa students are required to seek immigration advice from the International Student Advisory Service (ISAS) as a compulsory part of their application process.
8. Although there is technically still a connection with the University, there is no active student registration status for this period of absence, and this drives certain other outcomes, including a lack of insurance; limited library access; and lack of access to University provision, (such as teaching, tutorials,

academic supervision, University accommodation and Counselling Services) during the period of Leave of Absence.

9. Any pre-existing University processes, (such as investigations into plagiarism, fitness to practise, and student misconduct) will be suspended for the duration of any approved Leave of Absence, and will recommence upon the students return to study.
10. All time spent on a Leave of Absence for Taught programmes still counts towards the maximum period of registration.
11. The above implications represent the 'default' position, however, it is acknowledged that there will be certain anomalous circumstances that arise and these should be referred to an Extenuating Circumstances Panel.

Proposed Categories of Leave of Absence

12. There are a number of categories for Leave of Absence recording, in order to accurately reflect the reasons for students interrupting their studies. These categories are either Medical or Non-medical in nature, and the latter include the following:
 - i. Maternity and Paternity;
 - ii. Transfer of degree programme;
 - iii. Placements;
 - iv. Competitive Sports;
 - v. Compulsory Leave of Absence.

Evidence requirements

13. As noted above, a Leave of Absence is not an automatic entitlement. All students wishing to apply for a Leave of Absence are required give valid reasons and supporting evidence for their request.

Alternatives to a Leave of Absence

14. The following routes are identified as possible alternatives to a Leave of Absence:
 - i. Switch to part time study, (if academically and legally viable);
 - ii. Extensions, (where the time period will not include progression);
 - iii. Agree and implement an Academic Plan, (an example is attached as Appendix 2).

Retrospective Leaves of Absence

15. Any retrospective Leave of Absence should be the exception not the norm, and should only be approved under certain circumstances. Extra scrutiny will be undertaken in these cases.
16. In order to submit a request for a retrospective Leave of Absence, the student must provide independent third party evidence, and, must be able to provide

reasons as to why they were unable to present the evidence at the time (in line with the Code of Practice on Extenuating Circumstances)

Processing a Leave of Absence Application

17. The decision as to whether or not to grant, in principle, a request for a Leave of Absence remains an academic one.
18. The details relating to each Leave of Absence application, (such as start and end dates, and authorising signatories), should be decided at College/School/Programme level as appropriate, taking into account the needs of the student and the programme of study/student cohort.
19. Verification and processing of Leave of Absence applications will be undertaken by Academic and Student Administration.

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